

Message Text

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16
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TO AMEMBASSY TOKYO
INFO AMCONSUL NAHA
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C O N F I D E N T A L SAPPORO 103

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, JA
SUBJECT: EXPRESSIONS OF SYMPATHY AND SUPPORT FOR FORMER PRIME
MINISTER TANAKA

1. SUMMARY: IN RECENT WEEKS WE HAVE BEEN STRUCK BY FREQUENCY OF
LOCAL EXPRESSIONS OF SYMPATHY OR SUPPORT FOR FORMER PRIME MINISTER
TANAKA. REGARDING HIM AS CAPABLE LEADER, TANAKA'S SYMPATHIZERS
SUGGEST EXTENUATING AND MITIGATING CIRCUMSTANCES TO RATIONALIZE
HIS BEHAVIOR AND TO ARGUE FOR LENIENT TREATMENT. WE THINK THAT
QUESTION OF HOW WIDELY SUCH VIEWS ARE HELD MIGHT MERIT FURTHER
CONSIDERATION. END SUMMARY.

2. OBVIOUSLY, THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE IN JAPAN WHO BELIEVE THAT
FORMER PRIME MINISTER TANAKA RECEIVED PRECISELY WHAT HE HAD
COMING. THE COLLECTIVE LEFT, MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES, AND YOUNGER
PEOPLE PARTICULARLY SEEM TO HOLD THIS VIEW. IN CONVERSATIONS
AROUND SAPPORO IN RECENT WEEKS, HOWEVER, WE HAVE BEEN STRUCK BY
THE FREQUENCY OF EXPRESSIONS OF SYMPATHY OR, IN SOME CASES, OF
POSITIVE SUPPORT FOR THE NOW JAILED FORMER PRIME MINISTER. SUCH
EXPRESSIONS HAVE COME PRIMARILY FROM BUSINESSMEN, BUT WE HAVE
ALSO HEARD THEM FROM HOUSEWIVES, OFFICE WORKERS AND EVEN A SCHOOL
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TEACHER.

3. INVARIABLY, THOSE WHO SUPPORT TANAKA PREFACE THEIR REMARKS BY SAYING THAT IF ONE HAS VIOLATED THE LAW, HE MUST BE PUNISHED. BUT, HAVING PAID LIP SERVICE TO LEGAL REQUIREMENTS, SUCH PEOPLE THEN GO ON TO ELABORATE THE REASONS WHY THEY THINK THAT THE TREATMENT TO WHICH TANAKA IS BEING SUBJECTED IS UNFAIR AND TOO HARSH. WHAT ALSO COMES THROUGH IS THAT THERE ARE STILL MANY JAPANESE WHO RESPECT TANAKA FOR HIS STYLE AND PAST ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND WHO, IN SOME CIRCUMSTANCES, MIGHT BE WILLING TO SUPPORT HIM IN THE FUTURE.

4. TANAKA, THEY SAY, HAS PERHAPS BEEN JAPAN'S MOST EFFECTIVE POSTWAR LEADER. THE ATTRIBUTES WHICH THEY MOST OFTEN ASCRIBE TO HIM ARE AN ABILITY TO MAKE DECISIONS, BOLDNESS IN TAKING ACTION, QUICKNESS IN GRASPING THE FUNDAMENTALS OF A PROBLEM, A GOOD MEMORY (PARTICULARLY IN RELATIONSHIP TO STATISTICS AND OTHER DATA), AND A NONBUREAUCRATIC APPROACH. THEY SEE HIM AS A MAN WHO ROSE BY DINT OF EFFORT FROM THE LOWER SOCIAL RANKS. THEY ALSO ADD, USUALLY WITH SOME DISCOMFORT, THAT HE WAS A MAN WHO KNEW HOW TO MAKE AND USE MONEY. TANAKA'S DEFENDERS GO ON TO DESCRIBE EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH, AT LEAST TO SOME DEGREE, JUSTIFY HIS ACTIONS AND MITIGATING CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH SUPPORT THE NOTION THAT HIS PUNISHMENT SHOULD BE A LIGHT ONE.

5. SO FAR AS EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES ARE CONCERNED, THEY POINT OUT THAT THE PRACTICE OF GIVING AWAY MONEY AT VARIOUS TIMES AND ON VARIOUS OCCASIONS, SUCH AS COMING OF AGE, MARRIAGES, FUNERALS, CONDOLENCES, AND SO ON, IS A COMMON PRACTICE IN JAPAN AND THAT THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CLIMATE IN JAPAN HAS BEEN ONE CONDUCTIVE TO THE READY USE OF MONEY TO OBTAIN A VARIETY OF ENDS. THEY STRESS THAT EVERYONE KNOWS THAT HUGE AMOUNTS OF MONEY HAVE BEEN UTILIZED FOR ELECTIONEERING AND OTHER POLITICAL PURPOSES. AND THEY ARE QUICK TO POINT OUT THAT TANAKA IS CERTAINLY NOT THE ONLY DIET MEMBER TO HAVE USED MONEY IN SUCH A MANNER AND CERTAINLY NOT THE ONLY DIET MEMBER WHO HAS BEEN TOUCHED BY THE SCENT OF BRIBERY. THEY SAY THAT ANOTHER EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCE IS THAT IF HE REALLY INFLUENCED DECISIONS TO PURCHASE LOCKHEED AIRCRAFT, HE DID SO IN JAPAN'S BEST INTEREST. TANAKA REALIZED THAT IT WAS NECESSARY TO COOPERATE WITH FORMER PRESIDENT NIXON TO CORRECT THE TRADE IMBALANCE BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND JAPAN. IN AN INTERNATIONAL SITUATION CHARACTERIZED BY DOLLAR SHOCKS, OIL SHOCKS AND SIMILAR PROBLEMS, HIS COOPERATIVE
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ACTION WAS NECESSARY FOR THE PROMOTION OF JAPAN'S INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS. ANY PRIME MINISTER MIGHT WELL HAVE DONE THE SAME THING. BESIDES THEY ADD, THE TRI-STAR IS, AFTER ALL, A GOOD AIRPLANE.

6. SO FAR AS MATTERS IN MITIGATION WHICH ARE RAISED TO SUPPORT THE NOTION THAT TANAKA SHOULD NOT BE HARSHLY TREATED, THE FOLLOWING ASSERTIONS ARE THE MOST FREQUENT: FIRST, THE MASS MEDIA, WHICH ONCE SPOKE OF HIM IN TERMS OF HIGH PRAISE, HAVE NOW TURNED AGAINST

TANAKA AND VILIFIED HIM TO AN UNWARRANTED DEGREE. HE HAS ALREADY SUFFERED GREATLY FROM THIS ATTACK ON HIS REPUTATION. SECOND, THE JAPANESE PEOPLE SHOULD REMEMBER THE DEBT THEY HAVE TO TANAKA FOR HIS HANDLING OF RELATIONS WITH FOREIGN COUNTRIES, PARTICULARLY THE SUCCESSFUL EFFORTS HE MADE TO NORMALIZE RELATIONS WITH CHINA. THIRD, TANAKA, IF IN FACT HE ACCEPTED BRIBES, DID NOT DO SO TO LINE HIS OWN POCKETS BUT RATHER, LIKE HIS PEERS, USED WHATEVER MONEY HE OBTAINED ONLY FOR POLITICAL PURPOSES. FOURTH, TANAKA IS SOMEHOW BEING SACRIFICED TO PROTECT LDP INTERESTS GENERALLY AND SOME LDP LEADERS SPECIFICALLY. FOR EXAMPLE, TANAKA SYMPATHIZERS ARGUE THAT BY PERMITTING THE ARREST OF TANAKA, PRIME MINISTER MIKI IS FRONTING FOR NAKASONE IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN THE SUPPORT OF THE NAKASONE FACTION FOR HIMSELF. FINALLY (AND PERHAPS REFLECTING A GEOGRAPHICAL BIAS), DESPITE THE DEFICIENCIES AND INFLATION PRODUCING TENDENCIES, OF HIS ARCHIPELAGO REMODELING PLAN, TANAKA PROMOTED THE BEST INTERESTS OF LESS DEVELOPED PLACES LIKE HOKKAIDO AND THE TOHOKU.

7. THOSE WHO SEE PRAISEWORTHY ATTRIBUTES IN TANAKA'S PAST LEADERSHIP, WHO CAN RATIONALIZE HIS BEHAVIOR, AND WHO CAN ARGUE THAT HE SHOULD BE DEALT WITH IN A LENIENT WAY ARE GIVEN TO CONCLUDE THAT IT WILL BE A LONG TIME BEFORE JAPAN AGAIN CAN PRODUCE AS ABLE A LEADER. THEY ALSO BELIEVE THAT MANY PEOPLE IN JAPAN HOLD VIEWS SIMILAR TO THEIR OWN. SOME MAINTAIN THAT TANAKA COULD AGAIN BE REELECTED TO THE DIET, EVEN WHILE STILL IN JAIL.

8. COMMENT: THE FOREGOING VIEWS REPRESENT THE THINKING OF A LIMITED SAMPLING OF PEOPLE, IN THIS CASE, PRIMARILY BUSINESSMEN IN SAPPORO. WE DO NOT REALLY KNOW HOW WIDELY SUCH VIEWS ARE HELD; AND CERTAINLY A JUDGMENT ON THE RANGE AND DEPTH OF LIKE SENTIMENTS ELSEWHERE IN JAPAN IS BEYOND OUR COMPETENCE. IF, HOWEVER, MIKI AND OTHER LDP LEADERS ALSO PERCEIVE THAT THERE IS A BODY OF CONTINUING SUPPORT FOR TANAKA, IT COULD CONCEIVABLY INFLUENCE FUTURE HANDLING OF HIS CASE. SUCH POPULAR SENTIMENT MIGHT ALSO PROVIDE

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A BASIS FOR MAINTAINING COHESION AMONG THE MEMBERS OF THE TANAKA FACTION. IT MIGHT ALSO POINT TOWARD SOME CONTINUING FUTURE POLITICAL INFLUENCE FOR TANAKA. THIS IS, OF COURSE, SPECULATION BASED ON MINIMAL EVIDENCE, BUT WE HAVE HEARD THE PRO-TANAKA SENTIMENTS VOICED FREQUENTLY ENOUGH TO HAVE BEEN STRUCK BY THEM, AND THINK THAT THE QUESTION OF HOW MUCH CURRENCY THEY HAVE MIGHT MERIT SOME FURTHER CONSIDERATION.

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